

# Moments *for* You

**Volume 55, Number 3**

**Theme: Parables**



## THE SOWER OF SEED

*“He spake many things unto them in parables” (Matthew 13:3).*

### WHAT IS A PARABLE?

Christ’s words were always picturesque. He spoke of camels creeping through the hole in a needle (Matthew 19:24), of people trying to remove specks from another’s eye when a plank was in their own (Matthew 7:5). He referred to a house divided against itself, destined to fall down (Mark 3:25), to tossing children’s bread to dogs (Mark 7:27). Strictly speaking, however, these are not stories. The stories Jesus told fall into a particular category known as *parable*. A parable is a story taken from a real life situation from which a moral or spiritual truth is drawn. Examples are many: the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14), the wedding banquet (Matthew 22:1-14), and many others.

Parables differ from fables in that a fable is not a real situation. Parables also differ from allegories, since in an allegory each or nearly every detail has meaning. Parables are merely real-life stories from which one or possibly a few basic truths are drawn.

### THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

If a person were to begin reading the New Testament at Matthew 1:1, he would read quite a while before encountering a parable. But with chapter 13 that suddenly changes—here, seven parables are recorded. The first parable deals with the beginnings or origins of the kingdom of God. It is compared to a farmer sowing seed (Matthew 13:3-9). Not all of Christ’s

parables are explained, but this one is (vv. 18-23). The seed is the gospel, and the soil is the human heart. The emphasis is on the various kinds of hearts and how they reject or receive Christ’s message.

### THE HARD HEART

The first type of soil represents the hard heart, of which there are many today. It is described as soil along the path (v. 4). Such ground has been trampled down by the many feet that have passed that way over years. Because the soil is hard, the seed that falls there merely lies on the path and does not sink in, and the birds (which Christ compares to the devil or the devil’s workers) soon snatch it away. What is it that makes the human heart hard? There can only be one answer: sin. Sin hardens the heart, and the heart that is hardened sins even more.

### THE SHALLOW HEART

The second type of soil stands for the shallow heart. Jesus described it as soil covering rocky ground. When the seed fell there it sank in, but only to a very shallow depth. It sprang up quickly, but it also faded quickly in the sun’s heat because it had no root. Many people fit this description. They are attracted to the joy and excitement of a church where much is happening. They hear the gospel and seem to fit in. Many even make a profession of faith. But then some difficulty comes and just as suddenly as they once seemed to embrace the faith, they fall away, because they were never really born again.

### THE STRANGLER HEART

The third type of soil stands for the strangled heart. “He also that received seed among the thorns is he

that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (v. 22). I do not need to point out how many lives are choked by riches today. It was even true in Jesus’ day (see Matthew 19:23, Mark 10:25, Luke 6:24). Riches do not choke a person all at once. It is a gradual process. Slowly, very slowly, they strangle the buddings of spiritual life within. Beware of that if you either have possessions or are on your way to acquiring them. Above all, beware if you are saying, “I’ll think about spiritual things when I’m older.”

### THE OPEN HEART

The last type of soil is the one to which the entire parable has been heading. It is the open heart, the heart that receives the gospel like good soil receives seed. Is your heart an open heart? Are you receptive to God’s truth? Do you allow it to settle down into your life and thinking so that it turns you from sin, directs your faith to Jesus, and produces the Holy Spirit’s fruit? You may say, “I’m afraid not. I wish my heart was like that, but I’m afraid it is hard or shallow or strangled by this world’s goods. What can I do?”

The answer is that you can do nothing, any more than soil can change its nature. But there is one who can—the divine Gardener. He can break up the hard ground, uproot the rocks, and remove the thorns. Jesus said, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:27). In other words, “With God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). They are possible for you. Come to Christ and allow Him to give you a heart that will receive the gospel.

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## THE PRODIGAL SON

*“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” (Luke 15:10; read verses 1-32 if possible).*

The business of a parable is to teach us one great positive truth. If ever that should be clear, it is in this particular case. This parable is one of three parables obviously meant to reply to the murmurings of the Pharisees and scribes. The first two parables impress upon us the love of God as an activity which seeks out the sinner, that takes infinite trouble in order to find him and rescue him, and to show the joy of God and all the host of heaven when even one soul is saved.

Then comes this parable of the prodigal son. Why the greater elaboration? The first two parables have stressed God’s activity alone without telling us anything about the actions or reactions or condition of the sinner, so this parable is spoken lest anyone should be so foolish as to think that we should all be automatically saved by God’s love, just as the sheep and the lost coin were found.

### A NEW BEGINNING

The first truth this parable proclaims is the possibility of a new beginning for all, even the most desperate. No case can be worse than that of the prodigal son, yet even he can start again. He has touched bottom, he has gone down so low that he could not possibly descend any further. Never has a more hopeless picture been drawn than that of this boy in the far country amidst the husks and the swine, penniless and friendless, utterly hopeless and forlorn, utterly desolate and dejected. But even he gets a fresh start. There is a turning point which leads on to fortune and

to happiness even for him. What a blessed gospel, and especially in a world like this! What a difference the coming of Jesus Christ has made! What new hope for mankind appeared in Him!

### HERE'S THE CATCH

This message of the gospel is not something vague and general like the world's message, but something to which definite conditions are attached. To avail ourselves of this new beginning and new start which is offered by the gospel, we must observe the following points.

1. The first is that we must face our position squarely, honestly, and truly. We are told that this young man "came to himself" (v. 17). He saw that his troubles were entirely due to his own actions and that he had been a fool. He saw that he should never have left his father, and should certainly never have treated him as he had done. He looked at himself and could scarcely believe that it was really himself. He looked at the husks and at the swine. He owned up to it all.

Have you done that? Have you really looked at yourself? Look at your hands—are they clean? Look at your lips—are they pure? Look at your feet—where have they been? Look around at your position and your surroundings. Be honest! It is not enough that you should just bemoan your state or feel miserable. How did you ever get into such a state and condition? Look at the swine and the husks and realize that it is all due to the fact that you have left your Father's house. You are where you are today entirely as the result of your own choices and your own actions. Face that and admit it. That is the very first essential step on the way back.

2. The next is to realize that there is only One to whom you can turn and

only one thing to do. With regard to the prodigal, "No man gave unto him" (v. 16). He had tried and exhausted his own efforts and the efforts of all other people. There was but one left. Father! The last, the only hope. The gospel always insists upon our coming to that point. Realize that all your efforts to reform yourself must fail as they have always failed. Realize further that there is only one power that can put you right—the power of Almighty God.

3. As you turn to Him, you must realize further that you can plead nothing before Him except His mercy and His compassion. As the prodigal son left home his great word was "give" (v. 12). He demanded his rights. He was full of self-confidence and even had a feeling that he was not being given his due and his rights. "Give!" But when he returns home, his vocabulary has changed and his word is now "make" (v. 19). Now he feels he is nobody and nothing, and realizes that his first need is to be made into something. "Make me!"

If you feel that you have any right to demand pardon and forgiveness from God, I can assure you that you are damned and lost. But if you realize that you have sinned against God and angered Him; if you feel you are nothing in view of the way you have left Him and turned your back upon Him; if you just cast yourself upon Him and His mercy, asking Him if in His infinite goodness and kindness He can possibly make something of you, all will be different.

4. Having realized all this, act upon it. Leave the far country. Leave the swine and the husks. Turn your back upon sin and give yourself to God. Feelings and desires and inclinations will do you no good. Do it! Make a break. Get to God and get right with

God! Take your stand. Trust Him! How ridiculous it would have been for the prodigal to have thought of all he did and yet not do it! He would still have remained in the far country. But he did it. He went to his father and cast himself upon his mercy. You must do the same.

### A REAL NEW START

When you turn to God, you will find a real, solid new beginning and new start. It is not something mystical. It is no mere matter of sentiment or feelings. It is real and actual. In Jesus Christ a real genuine new start and new beginning are possible. And they are possible in Him alone!

The greatness of the father's love in the parable is seen in what he did. Observe how when the father goes to meet the son, he embraces him and kisses him (v. 20). And how quickly he commands the servants to strip off the rags and the tatters of the far country, and remove from his son every trace of his evil past. That is always the first thing that happens when a sinner turns to God. We go to Him and expect just as little as the prodigal; all we ask for is a kind of new beginning. God amazes and surprises us in His very first action by blotting out our past. I know that my rags and tatters have really gone when I see them on the person of Jesus Christ the Son of God, who wore them in my stead and became a curse in my place. The Father commanded Him to take my filthy rags off me and He has done so. He bore my iniquity, He clothed and covered Himself with my sin. He has taken it away and has drowned it in the sea of God's forgetfulness. And when I see and believe that God in Christ has not only forgiven but also forgotten my past, who am I to try to look for it and to find it?

But the father does not stop at that.

He clothes the boy in a way that is worthy of a son and places a ring on his finger (v. 22). No one else could do that but the father. It is precisely the same with us when we turn to God. He not only forgives and blots out the past, He makes us sons. He gives us new life and new power. He will clothe you with the robe of Christ's righteousness. He will not only tell you that He regards you as a child, but make you feel that you are one. The world only tries to clean the old suit and make it look respectable. God in Christ alone can clothe us with the new robe and really make us strong.

### NOW IS YOUR CHANCE

Here is an opportunity for a real new beginning. It is the only way. God Himself has made it possible by sending His only begotten Son into this world, to live and die and rise again. It matters not at all what you have been, nor what you are like at this moment. You only have to come to God confessing your sin against Him, casting yourself upon His mercy in Jesus Christ, acknowledging that He alone can save and keep. Come! —Condensed from *Evangelistic Sermons* by David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Published by Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle, PA.

***“This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them” (Luke 15:2).***

These words were meant as a criticism, but it is truly our Saviour's boast and glory that He does so. He came to this world that He might receive sinners and bring them into fellowship with Himself. *That about sums up the whole truth of Christianity.* Praise God, every poor sinner not only may draw near to Him, but may share in all the riches of the grace of God. —August Van Ryn

## THE PRODIGAL AT HOME

We have been so captured by the sentiment, warmth, and emotion of the story of the younger son, his wanderings, and the love with which he was accepted on his return, that we have missed what Jesus was raising as the crucial point: How will the older brothers of the world, the outwardly religious, respond to the grace of God?

In other words, the focal point of this story is not the younger brother, but the older one. That's evident from the way this whole wonderful chapter begins. We are told at the outset that the tax collectors and sinners were gathered around Jesus—as they so often were—to hear Him. Theoretically, that should have made the religious leaders happy, but it didn't. The “good people” couldn't understand why Jesus was so pleased to associate with sinners.

Many of us are like this older brother. We live quite responsible lives, obey the basic laws, are generally moral, and probably work hard in community projects, service clubs, and half-a-hundred church committees. We're in a position to sympathize with the older brother.

Jesus loved the older brother, to be sure. But it's clear that Jesus was disappointed in him. There is something very wrong with this older brother, but what is it? The older brother had never really discovered the joys of home; no more, perhaps, than the younger brother before his days of wandering. He didn't realize how fortunate he was to be here, living in the daily blessing of a loving father. He needed what his brother experienced in the pig pen: to “come to himself.”

It's obvious that the younger son was wasting himself. He did it con-

spicuously and dramatically. But the older brother was wasting his life away, too—not as obviously, but just as tragically. While the younger brother wasted himself in crude, riotous living, the older one did so in mean, small, selfish living. That's why I call this older brother “the prodigal who stayed at home.”

There's a chance the same thing might be said of you and me. Growing up respectable, moral, and religious, we may in truth be just as prodigal—just as far from home—as if we had gone to the far country of corruption. If so, I have good news for us. The Father will welcome us home.

—Condensed from *Parables From The Back Side* by J. Ellsworth Kalas. Copyright © 1992 by Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN.

Let us cherish this thought deeply in our souls—the gospel of our peace is the source of joy to Him who planned and accomplished it, as these parables testify to us. —J. G. Bellett

## THE EMPTY HEART

*“When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first” (Matthew 12:43-45).*

Our Lord had a quick eye for moral tragedies, and in the pictorial setting of these verses He has delineated one of the saddest of them all. Do you see what this man's danger was? It was the peril of an *empty heart*. One may

gain an apparent victory by overcoming bad habits, or in “turning over a new leaf.” But it is not sufficient to merely expel the wrong. We must allow God to fill the empty heart with nobler things, or else we will end up in a worse state than before.

And so I bring you face to face with the great mystery of an indwelling Christ. It is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27), that saves you from the peril of the empty heart. The gospel does not merely come to you and say, “Dear sinner, you must give up that sin.” It does not bid you empty your heart of evil, and leave it empty. God knows the danger of a soul unoccupied, so the gospel is prepared to give you something far better than what it drives away. It is prepared to inhabit the temple of your heart with the Holy Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Now “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17), and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is life. And it is that new liberty and life within the heart that make us strong when old things sneak back to tempt us again. “I can do all things,” cried the apostle Paul—not through a barred door and an empty heart—“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).

Dear unsaved friend, you have been fighting to evict your sin. But what you need is a new power in its place. I wish to ask you seriously and simply, have you ever made room for Jesus Christ, to take Him in? There is love, there is power, there is liberty in Christ. It is in Him that we are “more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37). It is in Him that our last state shall be our best. Open your heart. Receive the gift of God.

—George H. Morrison, adapted.

## THE SINNER'S EXCUSES

*“They all with one consent began to make excuse” (Luke 14:18).*

When a man prepares a feast, men rush in; but when God prepares one they all begin to make excuses and don't want to go.

One of the excuses given in this parable was that the man invited had bought a piece of ground and had to look at it. It was a lie, for he ought to have looked at it before he bought it. Then the next man said he'd bought some oxen and must prove them. That was another lie. If he hadn't proved them before he bought them, he should have, and could have done it after the supper just as well as before it. But the third man had the silliest, the worst excuse of all. He said he had married a wife and couldn't come. Why didn't he bring her with him?

These seemed to be foolish excuses, but they were not any more so than the excuses of today. Indeed, the excuses of men are getting worse and worse all the time. They say they can't believe the Bible; it's so mysterious. If Christians, if theologians have studied it for forty, fifty, sixty years, and then only begin to understand it more fully, how could a man expect to understand it by one reading?

Another says God is a hard Master. No, that is one of Satan's lies. The devil is the hard master. In the Tombs of New York there is over a door the remark, “The way of the transgressor is hard.” God's yoke is easy, His burden is light. Ask prisoners, ask gamblers, ask sinners if Satan's yoke is easy. It's the hardest of all.

One of the excuses that we very often hear people giving is that becoming a Christian will make them gloomy—they will have no joy until they get to Heaven. We look forward

to that happy future, but, thank God, we have some pleasure here. Indeed, no man in the world should be so happy as a man of God. A man away from God cannot have true pleasure. He is continually thirsting for something he cannot get until he comes to the living fountain. The more a man is lifted up to heaven, the more joy and peace and gladness he has.

“Oh, but that is not my case,” says another. “I am too bad to become a Christian.” Notice how the master says in the parable, “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind” (v. 21)—just invite them all. I don’t care how vile your heart may be, only accept the invitation of Jesus Christ and He will make you fit to sit down with the rest at the feast. The gospel bids you come as you are.

I haven’t exhausted all the excuses. If I covered them all, you would simply make more by tomorrow. What has to be done with all the excuses is to bundle them all up and label them “Satan’s lies.” There is not an excuse that is not a lie. When you stand at the throne of God no man can give an excuse. It is easy enough to excuse yourself to Hell, but you cannot excuse yourself to Heaven.

“Come; for all things are now ready” (Luke 14:17). Accept the invitation now, my friends. Do not let another day pass, do not eat, do not drink, until you accept the most important thing in this wide world. Blessed is he who shall be found at that marriage feast.

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). —D.L. Moody, condensed.

## BEHOLD THE BRIDEGROOM

*“At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him” (Matthew 25:6).*

Who is the bridegroom? He is the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you believe that Jesus is coming again? Remember in John 14:3 He says, “I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” Are you ready for the coming of the Lord Jesus?

Isaiah 53:5 says, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.” The Lord Jesus was wounded for my transgressions and yours. He was wounded at the hands of men and then at the hands of a sin-hating God for my crimes and your crimes. Won’t you put your name in there? “He was wounded for [my] transgressions.” Think of Him bearing your sins in His own body on the tree.

*“The bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut” (Matthew 25:10).* The Lord Jesus will come. Are you ready? We’re not talking about being baptized, or belonging to a church, or doing the best that you can. We are talking about a personal experience with the Lord. There needs to be a personal trust in the Lord Jesus for salvation, a coming in repentance and faith to the One who loves you, who died for you, and rose again.

“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9).

—Condensed from “Behold the Bridegroom” by John D. McNeil.